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"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE BOOK OF RUTH: FROM A BELIEVER IN SATAN'S TRAP TO A BABY IN NAOMI'S LAP

Wade L. Webster

Just four chapters in length, and sandwiched between Judges and First Samuel, it is easy to overlook the book of Ruth. However, I challenge you not to do so. It is a rich and rewarding study. I don't believe that "the half" has yet been told of its riches. I invite you to come and explore it with me.

Satan's Trap (Ruth 1)

Although Satan is not specifically mentioned in Ruth, he was active throughout it. No doubt, there are many unspoken temptations such as Ruth's being tempted to turn back to Moab and Boaz's being tempted to cheat the one who had the first claim of redemption. I believe that Satan's activity is especially seen in the first chapter of Ruth (*cf. Job 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:8*). In the opening chapter, Satan set his sights on Elimelech's family—one of the older (1:2) and more prominent families in Bethlehem (1:19).

I am convinced that Satan laid a trap for Elimelech and his family (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:7; 6:17; 2 Tim. 2:26). He convinced Elimelech to leave home for the far country (Lk. 15:13). Although Moab was geographically close (about 50 miles east) to Bethlehem, it was spiritually distant. The people in Moab worshipped the cruel and corrupt Chemosh (1:15; *cf. Jer. 48:7, 13, 46*). To court Chemosh's favor or to pacify him, they sacrificed their children (2 Kings 3:26-27). Surely, Moab would not be a place where a godly man would want to raise his family (Gen. 19).

Satan convinced Elimelech to leave God's bread box (Bethlehem "house of bread") for God's wash pot (*Moab - Psa. 60:8; 108:9*). He convinced Elimelech to trust in the hills of Moab rather than in the hands of God. He convinced him to take up refuge among God's enemies instead of God's people. Down through the years Moab had been Israel's enemy. They had refused Israel passage through their land (*Deut. 23:3-4; Judg. 11:17*); they had refused Israel help (*Deut. 23:4*); they had unsuccessfully hired Balaam to curse them (*Num. 22-24*); they had successfully used women to seduce them (*Num. 25*); and, they had oppressed Israel for eighteen years under Eglon (*Judg. 3:12-30*).

No doubt, Elimelech believed he was making a smart business move. After all, there was a famine in Bethlehem and there was plenty in Moab (1:2). Rather than riding out the famine in faith as others like Boaz did, Elimelech chose to flee to the fields of Moab. Like Lot, he chose well-watered plains and pitched his tent in the wrong direction (*Gen. 13:10-13*). Elimelech's choice, like Lot's, would cost him plenty. Sodom cost Lot his wife and daughters, while Moab cost Elimelech his life and the lives of his sons. Naomi would tell the women of Bethlehem that she had gone out "full" and had returned home "empty" (1:21). She had gone out wed but came home widowed; with children but came home childless; young but came home old; hopeful but came home doubtful; pleasant but came home bitter. John G. Butler observed that it is better to dwell in Bethlehem in

a time of famine than in Moab in a time of plenty.

Please note that Elimelech and his family only went to "sojourn" in Moab (1:1), not to live there. At most, they planned to be there a season or so. However, they "continued there" (1:2; *cf. Gen. 19:9*). As you know, this is always the case with sin. It keeps you longer than you intended to stay and it costs you more than you wanted to pay. Elimelech and his family dwelled there at least a decade (*Ruth 1:4*); and perhaps more, depending on how the time in the text is reckoned.

Likely, Elimelech saw little danger in a "sojourn" in Moab (*cf. Gen. 12:10*). He may have reasoned that his family would be back in Bethlehem long before his boys looked for brides. However, one season quickly turned into two, two turned into four, and before long a decade had passed. Boys grew into men and they chose Moabites instead of Israelites for wives. Although there is disagreement over whether this was sinful, I believe it was (*Deut. 23:3-6; Neb. 13:1-3, 23-27*). Some argue that the Moabites were not among the forbidden nations (*Deut. 7:1-6*). However, Moab was listed among the nations from which Solomon took "strange" or unauthorized wives (*Deut. 7:1-6; 1 Kings 11:1*). How was it acceptable then for Boaz to marry Ruth? The restriction was given because of idolatry. Ruth was no longer an idolater by the time that Boaz took her to be his wife (*Ruth 1:16-17; cf. Rahab*).

Although the way seemed right to

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Elimelech, it was all wrong (*Prov. 14:12*). It was the way of death. It cost him and his sons their lives. They went to find grain, but found graves instead. Three verses into the book, we have one death. By the time that we get five verses into the book, we have three deaths. Do you know of a more depressing start to any book of the Bible? Of those who came to Moab, only Naomi would make it back to Bethlehem again; and even she would clearly show the strain of the

"sojourn." Old friends in Bethlehem would ask, "Is this Naomi?" (*1:19*). Naomi had been gone a long time and the years had not been kind to her. It is interesting that Naomi saw what happened to her family as a judgment from God (*1:13, 21; cf. Jer. 42:17, 22; Psa. 119:67, 71, 75; Isa. 59:12*).

Ruth's Hap (Ruth 2)

The journey home for Naomi began when she heard in Moab that "the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread" (*1:6*). They arrived in Bethlehem at "the beginning" of the barley harvest (*1:22*). To her credit, Ruth wasted no time getting to work. To Naomi, she said, "Let me now go to the field, and glean" (*2:2*). No doubt, as a Moabite maiden, she knew she would likely face mistreatment. However, she struck out hoping to find "grace" in someone's sight (*2:2*). She was looking for grace to help in time of need (*Heb. 4:16*), and she found it (*Gen. 6:8; Mt. 7:7-8*). It was truly amazing (*Ruth 2:8-10, 13-16*). Boaz provided Ruth with provision and protection.

Although Ruth was not familiar with Bethlehem, its places or its people, her "hap" was to "light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech" (*2:3*). The word "hap" refers to "a happening" or a "chance event" (*cf. Eccl. 2:14-15; 3:19; 9:2-3*). It refers to "something met with" or "something befallen" (*cf. 1 Sam. 20:26*). From a human standpoint, Ruth's arriving in the right field seemed the result of blind chance or dumb luck. However, we know that it was a matter of divine providence. Ruth had placed her trust in God and He was providing for her (*Ruth 1:16-17; 2:12*). Consider all the happenings, and you will rule out chance. You will realize that it was "of the Lord" that she came to the field of Boaz (*Ruth 2:20; 3:10*).

Someone has defined providence as "the hand of God in the glove of history." For sure, we can see God's hand in the events of the second chapter of Ruth. With Paul we can boldly say, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (*Rom. 8:28*). A most beautiful picture is given of providence in the book. It is pictured as shelter beneath the wings of God (*Ruth 2:12; cf. Mt. 23:37*). What a beautiful picture the book of Ruth provides us of God. In it, we see the greatness of God in caring for Naomi and Ruth. No doubt, we are reminded of what Moses declared about God: "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment" (*Deut. 10:17-18*).

Providence means "to provide in advance." It is clear from the text that God had provided in advance for Naomi and Ruth's coming. It is worthy to note that when Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, it was "the beginning" of the barley harvest (*Ruth 1:22*). A day earlier, and the grain would not have been available to them. However, as it was, food was waiting for them when they arrived. Further, it is worthy of note that Boaz arrived at his field at while Ruth was gleaning there. Notice the language of the text "And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem..." (*2:4*). When inspiration tells us to "behold" something, we should do so. What are we beholding in this context? We are beholding the providence of God.

It is worthy of mention that of the four classes of people that fell under the special care of God in Mosaic legislation (the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless) Ruth belonged to three of them. Although she wasn't an orphan, she had left father and mother (*Ruth 1:15-17*).

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Just as God providentially cared for Ruth, we can be sure that He will care for us if we put Him first (*Mt. 6:25-34; Psa. 37:25*). It will also be our "hap" to light upon friendly fields.

Boaz's Nap (Ruth 3)

With the barley and wheat harvests ended (*2:23; 3:2 "wast"*), Naomi reasoned that the opportunity of redemption was quickly passing them by. The daily encounters in the field between Ruth and Boaz were about to end. Boaz's interest might wane. Realizing that the days were evil, Naomi determined to redeem the time (*Eph. 5:16; cf. 2 Cor. 6:2*). She set Ruth on a bold course of action. Ruth was to take the initiative and approach Boaz at the threshing floor.

Clearly, Boaz was interested in Ruth (*Ruth 2*). However, he had not approached her. Likely, he had not approached her because he was a great deal older than she was. Notice that when Boaz first saw Ruth, he asked, "Whose damsel is this?" (*Ruth 2:5-6; cf. 4:12*). "Damsel" refers to "a girl (from infancy to adolescence)," a "maiden," or a "young woman." You might say that Ruth was a damsel in distress.

Evidently, Boaz was old enough to be Ruth's dad. He repeatedly addressed her with the words, "My daughter" (*2:8; 3:10*), and thanked her for her kindness in not pursuing "young men, whether poor or rich" (*3:10*). In all likelihood, he was a contemporary of Naomi, who also addressed Ruth as a daughter (*2:22; 3:16, 18*).

Leaving nothing to chance, Naomi spelled out exactly how Ruth was to approach Boaz about redemption (*Ruth 3:1-5*). Ruth was to:

- **Wash Up** - "Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee..." Boaz had only seen her at work. She was likely dirty and sweaty.
- **Dress Up** - "...and put thy raiment upon thee..." Boaz had only seen her in field clothes.
- **Hurry Up** - "...and get thee down to the floor..." There was no time to waste.
- **Hold Up** - "...but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking." Ruth was to wait until she could have his full attention.
- **Look Up** - "And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie..." Lying at the feet of the wrong man could have been disastrous.
- **Step Up** - "...and thou shalt go in." Ruth was not to get cold feet while she was waiting.
- **Lift Up** - "...and uncover his feet, and lay thee down..." Ruth was to humbly approach him.
- **Listen Up** - "...and he will tell thee what thou shalt do." Ruth was to pay careful attention to what Boaz told her.

Although Boaz was likely tired from winnowing his wheat, and could have slept soundly until morning light, he would get little more than a nap on this night. Ruth "came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her

down" (*3:7*). No doubt, within a short time, Boaz' feet got cold, and he awoke to find Ruth at his feet. Although cold feet can be a problem when you want a man to marry you, it was not a problem in this case. From this moment on, Boaz would not have cold feet when it came to Ruth. He would begin the process of making her his wife the first thing the next morning (*3:13-14*) and would not rest until it was done (*3:18*).

I am reminded of how Adam had a like experience (*Gen. 2:21-22*). As you recall, Adam awoke from sleep to find that God had brought a beautiful helpmeet to him. I know it cost Adam a rib. However, I'm not sure what it cost Boaz. Whatever the cost, Boaz was glad to pay it. He couldn't get the money out of his pocket fast enough. Please note that Boaz counted Ruth as a gift "of the Lord" (*3:10; Prov. 18:22*). She was a virtuous woman whose price was far above rubies (*Prov. 3:11; 31:10*).

In God's wisdom and providence, Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi found rest in one another (*3:1*). Interestingly, the word "rest" refers to a "settled spot" or "a home."

Naomi's Lap (Ruth 4)

When the redemption of Ruth was complete, the people that were in the gate pronounced a blessing on Boaz and Ruth (*4:11-12*). They prayed that God might give them seed which would build the house of Israel and make Bethlehem famous (*Ruth 4:11-12*). If only they could have known the rest of the story as we do. If only they could have looked down through the pages of history and seen King David (*4:17-22*). If only, they could have seen Jesus Christ, the Son of David (*Mt. 1:1*).

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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Phone (662) 393-2690

FAX (662) 342-7152

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The Lord blessed the union of Boaz and Ruth with a son (4:13). Please note that God gave Ruth "conception." What had not happened in the years Ruth spent with Mahlon, happened immediately with Boaz. When Ruth bare a son, the women of Bethlehem blessed the Lord for giving Naomi a kinsman and prayed that his name might be famous in Israel. I don't think that they would have been disappointed in the outcome, do you? The women of Bethlehem also spoke of how that this son would be a "restorer" of Naomi's life and a "nourisher" of her old age" (Ruth 4:15). Ultimately, Jesus would be a restorer and a nourisher for us all.

When Naomi first arrived back in Bethlehem, she bitterly told these women that the Lord had brought her back "empty" (Ruth 1:21). However, such had not been the case. The Lord had brought her back with Ruth (1:19), who loved her and was better to her than seven sons (4:15). The woman whose arms had been empty when she arrived in Bethlehem, were now holding a baby. There was a baby in her lap. We read, "And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it" (4:16).

Isn't our God good? Although the words may not fit Naomi's case exactly, please consider the words of the psalmist: "He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD" (Psa. 113:9). Let me end with one more thought from the Psalms: "The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate" (Psa. 34:22; cf. 9:9-10; 2 Pet. 1:5-8).

I hope that our study has renewed your faith, restored your hope, and rekindled your fire. I am convinced that God can bring about the same dramatic changes in your life and mine that he brought about in the lives of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.

¹Butler, John G. **Ruth: The Ancestress of Christ.** Clinton, Iowa: LBC Publications, 1999, p. 15.

²Baker, Warren and Eugene Carpenter. **The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament.** Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003, #4745.

³Strong, James. **Hebrew And Chaldee Dictionary.** Nashville, TN: Manna Publishers, #4745.

⁴Ibid., #5291.

⁵Ibid., #4494.

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